

MISSOURI STATE PARKS

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Elephant Rocks State Park NATURE'S CIRCUS ELEPHANTS

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One of the most curious geologic formations in Missouri is found at Elephant Rocks State Park. Giant boulders of 1.5 billion-year-old granite stand end-to-end like a train of circus elephants. Many of the elephant rocks lie within the seven-acre Elephant Rocks Natural Area. This natural area is recognized for its outstanding geologic value.

Elephant Rocks Natural Area can be easily viewed from the one-mile paved Braille Trail. Designed especially for people with visual and physical disabilities, the Braille Trail is the first of its kind in Missouri state parks.

The formation of this extraordinary herd of elephants began during the Precambrian era about 1.5 billion years ago. Molten rock, called magma, accumulated deep below the earth's surface. The magma slowly cooled, forming red granite rock. As the weight of the overlying rock was removed by erosion, horizontal and vertical cracks developed, fracturing the massive granite into huge, angular blocks. Water permeated down through the fractures, and groundwater rounded the edges and corners of the blocks while still underground, forming giant rounded masses. Erosion eventually removed the disintegrated material from along the fractures, and exposed these boulders at the earth's surface.

Physical and chemical weathering in low areas on the crest of the large granite outcrop has produced distinct, roughly circular depressions up to several feet in diameter, called "solution pans" or "tinajitas". Temporary pools of water that collect in these depressions often provide a home for tadpoles and mosquito larvae.

Since no official census of the herd has ever been taken, the exact number of "elephants" inhabiting the park is unknown. Although the elephant rocks are continually eroding away, new elephants are constantly being exposed. Information collected on Dumbo, the patriarch of Elephant Rocks State Park, shows that he is 27 feet tall, 35 feet long and 17 feet wide. At a weight of 162 pounds per cubic foot, Dumbo tips the scales at a hefty 680 tons.

Just outside the park is the oldest recorded commercial granite quarry in the state. This quarry, opened in 1869, furnished facing stone for some Eads Bridge piers across the Mississippi River, and from 1880 to 1900, millions of paving blocks for the St. Louis levee and downtown streets came from this quarry. Other nearby quarries supplied granite for many major St. Louis buildings, as well as stone for the turned columns on the front porch of the Governor's mansion in Jefferson

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The Braille Trail is the first of its kind in Missouri state parks.



Photo courtesy of Missouri Division of Tourism.

City. Today, this granite is used primarily for monuments and building veneer.

The higher quality granite blocks produced from quarries before the area became a state park were used for building homes and other structures; the flawed and damaged stone was hammered into blocks, which were used for paving streets. Roughly the size of a shoebox, these granite paving blocks sold for about eight cents each. At that rate, a good block maker, producing 50 blocks per day, could earn a whopping \$4 a day! Pretty good wages for a very hard day's work.

The nearby town of Graniteville, in its day (circa 1890), boasted a population of more than 700 people, making it the largest town in the area. Most of the town was owned and built by the quarry compa-

ny. Walking down the street, you would have seen a hotel, post office, store, railroad depot and numerous homes. Today, only a few of the original granite buildings remain, including an impressive stone schoolhouse and several homes.

Thirty picnic sites among the giant red boulders provide ample opportunity for family picnicking and exploration of the elephant rocks. Camping is not available in Elephant Rocks State Park, but can be found in several nearby state parks. Pets must be on leashes. Rock-climbing equipment is not to be used in the park.

Elephant Rocks State Park
c/o Fort Davidson State Historic Site
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